

Batchelder (J. P.)

DR. J. P. BATCHELDER'S
INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

1858.

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AN
INAUGURAL ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE,

FEBRUARY 2d, 1858.

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BY J. P. BATCHELDER, M.D.,
PRESIDENT ELECT.

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GENTLEMEN—FELLOWS OF THE NEW YORK ACADEMY
OF MEDICINE :

CALLED by a vote declared unanimous, to preside over your deliberations during the coming year, I tender you my most hearty thanks for the honor you have done me, and also, for the singularly flattering manner in which it has been conferred.

Heartfelt indeed are the emotions awakened by this indication of your kind and friendly regard ; but these emotions are mingled with those of an opposite nature, no less sincerely felt. Since the last stated meeting of the Academy, it has to deplore the loss which it has sustained in the death of one of its most highly valued and distinguished Fellows—an event which has draped the survivors in the habiliments of mourning. To pass it by without allusion would be indecorous, and to indulge in panegyric would be out of place. You all knew him well, and will readily assent to the truth of the declaration, that Dr. F. U. Johnston was a man in the best sense of the term, and a physician without reproach.

The Academy of Medicine will be the theme of my discourse this evening.

Considering that the medical institutions in this

city, and, indeed, throughout the country, had been commenced by individuals, and sustained mainly by personal exertion with a view to private emolument, as well as to public utility, a few distinguished members of the profession, men of enlarged minds, and liberal views, met on the 12th of December, 1846, and consulted on the propriety of establishing an institution in this metropolis, which, ignoring private advantage or personal aggrandizement, should have special reference to the good of the profession, as a whole, and the result of the deliberations of that evening is the Academy of Medicine as it now exists.

Looking back from the stand-point of *this* evening, we discover in the obscurity of the past a luminous spot—a mere speck of light as it were, at whose first appearance and announcement some members of the profession could hardly see it, while others ignored, or laughed at and ridiculed it as an *ignis fatuus*; but in the even tenor of its way it has kept on increasing and enlarging, until now its light extends over the whole civilized world. Turning the telescope in an opposite direction and looking into the vast future, we behold a star of the first magnitude, beamy and glorious, rising higher and higher, illuminating and cheering the profession on through coming ages.

This is the Academy of Medicine !

The Academy of Medicine, then, what is it ? What are the objects at which it aims, and what the designs which it purposes to accomplish ?

The Academy of Medicine is an association of phy-

sicians, containing about three hundred members—the *distingué*—the *élite* of the medical profession in the city of New York and its vicinity. It has also a considerable number of Corresponding Fellows—the most celebrated practitioners in Europe and America, and also one Corresponding Fellow, who hails from farther Asia—a distinguished medical gentleman, a prince of the realm—a brother of the King of Siam. Opposed to all party spirit, or favoritism, it reckons among its fellows the cherished representatives of the several Medical Colleges, schools, societies, associations and clubs in the city, and is so entirely free from all cliqueism, that even a Kappa-Lambda man forgets that he is such the moment he enters the sacred inclosure.

It is indeed the rival of no society, and is, in fact, rivalled by none. It never seeks to depress; but ever to elevate. The offspring and heir of the profession, it desires only to promote its greatest good—its highest interest and its largest honor.

The topics to which I intend, at this time, briefly to call attention, are the obligations, relations and duties which connect and bind this Academy, as a chartered institution, to the profession; and the duties which each individual fellow owes to the Academy as an organized body; and lastly, the duty which the Academy owes to itself.

The first are prescribed by the Constitution, and the second by the By-laws; while the last proceeds from the nature of things.

The Constitution declares the objects of the Academy to be :

First. The cultivation and advancement of the Science of Medicine.

Second. The promotion of the character and honor of the Profession.

Third. The elevation of the standard of Medical Education.

The first obligation and duty imposed by the constitution has been provided for by the division of the Academy into sections, which embrace all its fellows and every department of knowledge pertaining to the science of medicine. Having, on a former occasion, detailed at considerable length the duties of the sections, I shall not go over that ground again.

Upon these sections it is right and just to bestow the meed of praise, which, under existing circumstances, they richly deserve.

So far as they have labored, they have labored well. Their deductions, it is believed, have been so carefully made, and their conclusions drawn from premises so firmly established, that "the responses whispered back from succeeding generations, through the long corridors of time," will be confirmatory of their correctness.

The section on Anatomy ; on Public Health ; on Theory and Practice ; and on Materia Medica and Botany, have done good service, and distinguished themselves by their labors, and the learned productions which they have, from time to time, presented for our edification and improvement : while that on Surgery has not been quite idle.

In thus particularizing these sections, I beg not to be considered as disparaging, or intending to dispar-

age any others. Those not alluded to would, I doubt not, have accomplished as much as those named, had similar circumstances and exigencies occurred to call forth their exertions, or even rendered necessary their labors.

This opportunity must not be allowed to pass without allusion to the discussion on Puerperal Fever, which has been going on for some time past in this body, and elicited important views in relation to the pathology and treatment of that fearful malady. The learning and eloquence displayed, of which we have a right to be proud, would have done honor to any deliberative assembly; and it is hoped, that this discussion will prove an incentive to other sections, to bring forward and discuss with their unquestioned ability, matters of equal or paramount importance.

But here, gentlemen, I am constrained to allude to what I am sorry to be obliged to mention—a shortcoming of the Academy, which I cannot but regard as a grievous fault.

There is a science which underlies every other, and modifies them all—a science which treats of a power that, so far as we know, not only pervades the whole physical universe, but reaches and influences every atom of which that universe is composed.

Ubiquitous and resistless in its operation, it would seem that the Great Creator of all things has been pleased to make it the emblem of his presence, and the symbol of his power—the representative of two of his attributes in the world of matter.

The science which treats of this mysterious agency,

unfolds its laws and explains the phenomena it induces, is Chemistry, which it would seem has been ignored by the Fellows of this Academy ; for the section on Chemistry and Pharmacy has never been organized. This is to be very much regretted, because it warrants the conclusion, that we either do not comprehend the importance of the subject, or that we have none in the Academy competent to carry on the business of this section. On whichever horn of the dilemma the Academy is placed, it cannot but suffer in the estimation of the scientific world ; we ought, therefore, to take immediate measures for the removal of this opprobrium.

Are there not amongst us those whose scientific instincts and attainments, whose academic pride or professional patriotism is sufficiently strong to induce them to volunteer in getting up and organizing this important section ? I am sure if they will but engage in the work, and prosecute it with zeal and energy, they will find themselves amply repaid for their devotion in this respect to the interests of the profession and honor of the Academy. All aware of the fact, that without a knowledge of chemistry and pharmacy, the physician cannot intelligently move a step, will readily comprehend how essential is this section to a complete organization of the system.

In addition to the sections, the constitution makes provision for standing committees, which, with the trustees and special committees appointed from time to time, as exigencies or circumstances require, should attend to all the business of the Academy—not of a scientific nature. The intention of this

arrangement is, that the business committed to them should be done out of the Academy, and so thoroughly and completely done, as to leave little or nothing for the Academy to do, but to hear, accept and adopt their reports. Most matters thus submitted are common-sense affairs, and require no discussion to enable men of common sense to understand them fully, from the mere statement of the facts which they involve ; they should, therefore, give place to concerns of graver import. As the Academy has but twelve stated meetings in a year, the saving of time is an important consideration, of which we are constantly reminded by the motto painted in capitals on the face of the speechless monitor* over my head—*“Putā! abhoc momento pendet eternitas,”* in plain English—Think! From this moment hangs eternity!

In discussing matters of a scientific and practical character, greater latitude should be allowed ; but even in this I beg leave to suggest, that much precious time may be saved, if those engaged in bringing them forward will adhere to points which have the most important bearing on the merits or peculiarities of the case or subject ; and discuss them rather didactically—simply with a view to convey information. In the statement of cases, point and brevity should be the guiding stars.

The next object of the Academy, as indicated by its constitution, is : “The promotion of the character and honor of the profession.”

* The Academy's clock.

This recognizes and establishes a relation, as well as enjoins a duty. This duty is somewhat analogous to that promulgated in the fifth commandment in the decalogue.

The Academy being the offspring of the profession, is thus required to honor its parent—"that its days may be long upon the land." This requirement obviously regards the cultivation and advancement of the science of medicine, and the "elevation of the standard of medical education."

The relation between the Academy and the profession, to which this clause in the constitution refers, is of a two-fold character.

It has respect to the fitness of persons proposed for admission, and their disposition when admitted, to labor for "the cultivation and advancement of the science." Without such disposition, none should be thought of as a suitable candidate for admission. It has also reference to those, if any such there be, who bring dishonor upon the profession.

Why promote the character and honor of the profession? Because we belong to it? No! but on account of its own doings—its intrinsic merits. It watches over unborn humanity—officiates at its birth—conserves its health, and is its faithful friend and guardian through its earthly career. It removes, allays, or prevents the pains of the body, and "calms the surges of the mind." It is the conservator of public as well as of private health. Upon its skill and efficiency the safety of a fleet, an army, or the salvation of a country may depend. Without disparaging either of the other learned professions, we deem

ours the most important. We concede, most readily and cheerfully, that they preach, but we practise; that they cogitate, but we "heal the sick;" that they promulgate good principles, but we exemplify them, for we "go about doing good."

The third object set forth in the constitution is, "The elevation of the standard of medical education."

Has the Academy labored with any degree of success for the attainment of this object?

We answer: Since its establishment the facilities for acquiring a thorough medical education have greatly increased. Three new medical colleges have been built in our midst with enlarged accommodations; the number of lecturers and lectures has proportionably augmented, with abundant material for dissection; the *cliniques* are, perhaps, ten times more numerous than they were at the time above mentioned, as well as more varied, ample, and better arranged, consequently more profitable to students and more numerous attended.

The City and Bellevue Hospitals have both been considerably enlarged and rendered more commodious. Speaking of these from much personal observation, I can say, that they alone offer greater advantages for clinical instruction than any number of students are likely to make available. Besides these, some two or three other hospitals have been recently opened for the reception of the sick. All these establishments have been rendered complete by the appointment of surgeons and physicians of marked ability—of *internes*—judicious, discreet, and faithful,

which, taken together, constitute a medical corps that will compare favorably with any other of equal size in the world. In addition I must suggest, that we have places in which specialities are taught by gentlemen abundantly competent ; as the New York Eye Infirmary and the New York Ophthalmic Hospital.

But some may invidiously ask, what has all this to do with the subject under consideration ? I answer, all these matters have, in the main, been accomplished by men of will and energy, who are, with one or two exceptions, fellows of this Academy ; and is it not fair to infer and affirm that it has had no trifling influence in bringing them about, especially when it is considered that it has never failed to encourage and cheer the actors on ?

In enumerating the facilities for elevating the standard of medical education I omitted to mention the Woman's Hospital, because we, as a body, had no hand in its origin. The ladies stole a march upon us. While we meditated they acted with their characteristic promptitude and energy, and have left us the alternative of either standing still or following in their wake with whatever grace we may. This hospital, the first, and indeed the only one of the kind in the world, our country, or rather country-women, have the honor of originating. Its success, under the guiding auspices of the distinguished gentleman* who stands at the head of it, with the blessing of Providence, is certain. The only regret I feel in relation to it is that the Academy has not the honor of founding or originating it.

* Dr. J. Marion Sims, who is a member of this body.

We come to the second topic which we proposed to consider : The duty which each individual fellow owes to the Academy as an organized body. I am fully aware, gentlemen, that I am about to step on ticklish ground, but shall, nevertheless, express with freedom my own views on this as on every other subject which concerns the weal of this institution, at all times, however, conceding to others the right to differ. The duties which attach to individual fellowship are shadowed forth in the by-laws, and are of great importance.

Permit me at the outset to say, that in my view a man is morally if not religiously bound to do what he agrees to do ; consequently, when he joins the Academy he binds himself to comply with all the rules and regulations laid down by the constitution and by-laws. He is not only held in honor to do this, but has given his bond to do it ; for all have signed the constitution and by-laws. Without it none can become fellows.

The duty which immediately grows out of fellowship is that of attending punctually all the meetings of the Academy, for without the regular attendance of fellows the business of the Academy cannot go on. If one stay away without adequate reason, another, and indeed all, may do the same. The result is obvious. On the same principle, the duty of attending meetings of the section to which a fellow belongs is equally binding ; and it is, furthermore, at least an implied duty, that every one should be on the *qui vive* for facts which relate to the science or practice of the healing art. These he is bound to

gather up and bring into the Academy for the good of all.

Permit me, furthermore, to suggest, or rather inquire, whether it would not be well for every fellow to select some one disease, to the investigation of whose causes, symptoms, pathology, and treatment he will devote his principal attention, until he has collected and arranged in the best possible manner all that is known of that disease, and bring the result of his labors into the Academy, or rather into the section to which he belongs, for examination, etc. ? I am convinced that every gentleman who will take the trouble to do this will be satisfied with the benefit which has accrued to himself alone.

During the last year the Academy has been compelled, for want of funds, to omit the publication of a part of its transactions ; besides, it is, I understand, in debt. Experience has fully proved, that the annual assessment on fellows is not sufficient to enable the Academy to meet current expenses, and defray such others as are necessary to sustain its character as a scientific body ; and there seems to be no way of meeting the exigencies of the case but by increasing the amount of assessments, and by their prompt payment, whatever they may be. This duty, although the last mentioned in the category, should be the first performed. Owing to its neglect, the treasurer informs me that he has been in trouble all the while, particularly the last year ; and but for the loan effected he hardly knows how he could have got along, and prevented the Academy's credit from suffering. Having for a long time anxiously and

sedulously watched the movements of this body, particularly those of a literary and scientific character, I became convinced that these could not be successfully and satisfactorily carried on without a tax of five dollars on each member; and I cannot doubt that every one who will be faithful to himself and the Academy will derive benefits from his membership which will be worth more than that amount to him. A single hint dropped in a discussion may be of incalculable value; it may be the means of saving a life, perhaps his own, or that of one very dear to him. Indeed I think the honor of being a fellow of this Academy, directly and indirectly considered, is worth more than five dollars to any one; for it gives him consequence with the public, increases his business, and affords him, if he will work, an opportunity to form a professional character and reputation of a high order. In this respect, my own observation fully accords with a remark once made to me by a distinguished practitioner who has twice occupied this chair, whose common sense is only exceeded by his integrity, which was to this effect: "They may say what they will about the Academy, a fellowship gives a man consequence and business."

It has been stated to me that some may find it difficult to pay the sum mentioned. Now I understand this matter, from experience, quite as well as any one; and I know that a man, if he be poor, will generally manage to get what he really has a passion for. Permit me just to hint, if we will but forego two or three unnecessary expenditures we shall all be able to advance the five dollars.

In the last place, we ask, are there no duties which the Academy owes to itself? One, at least, it seems to me, presents.

The Academy has no building in which to hold its own stated meetings, or those of its sections, or of its committees; no temple in which to place its "ALTARE COMMUNE," before which we can worship, and upon which offer oblations to our science.

When we cast the eye around and behold the magnificence of this great city; "its solemn temples, gorgeous palaces, cloud-capped towers," and aspiring domes, we are pained to learn that the Academy of Medicine has no home—that the profession is houseless. Not so with the other professions.

The clerical profession has its temples in which to gather its disciples. To the legal profession are assigned the "Halls of Justice," in which they hold forth, and where the goddess displays her balance and occasionally unsheaths her sword, but the medical profession has not "even where to lay its head;" it has no home, but it ought to have one. Whose duty is it to stir first in this matter? The relationship between the profession and the Academy is co-relative; it is, then, as much the duty of the profession to furnish a home for the Academy as it is for the Academy to furnish one for the profession; but, notwithstanding this reciprocity and union of interest, circumstances seem to justify the conclusion that the Academy should take the initiative and call on the profession to help; for it, as much as the Academy, needs a building in which to hold its large assemblages, as well as for the meetings of the various

associations, clubs, etc., into which it is broken up. By having a common place for all these meetings, much expense, as well as trouble and inconvenience, would be avoided. The necessities of the Academy are still more pressing. It not only wants a place in which to hold its own stated meetings, but actually needs one for the accommodation of its sections and committees. According to the present arrangement, these necessarily hold their meetings at the private residences of the respective chairmen, which, it must be admitted, is no very inconsiderable tax upon individual hospitality as well as liberality. This is felt by members of the sections, and doubtless operates in some, perhaps many instances, to prevent as full meetings as might otherwise be expected. There may be, although I vouch not for the fact, a state of feeling existing between certain members of a section and the chairman which would prevent their going to his house under almost any circumstances. If there was a common place for the meetings of the sections, neither of these considerations would occur to prevent the attendance of any member. In a common room, politeness would guarantee that no one's feelings should be wounded.

The sections, now six in number (another will soon, I trust, be added), hold, I believe, one or two meetings a month, with the exception that some of them have had, in the summer, vacations of a couple of months. The meetings of the sections, with those of the committees, probably amount to seventy-five, or more, in the course of the year. Besides, the business of the Academy has accumulated, and

is accumulating so fast as to render additional stated meetings necessary, perhaps semi-monthly. The Academy located in this city and State involves the reputation and character of the profession here and, in a measure, throughout the commonwealth. Much is expected of it, and shall that expectation be disappointed? Belonging to the profession and unlike any other institution in the land, we should spare no pains to make it what it should be ; and without a building, I see not how it can well reach the culminating point to which it aspires. Let us, then, gentlemen, seriously consider this matter.

Unaccustomed to preside in an assembly like this, and distrusting exceedingly my own ability, I feel the necessity of invoking, while on the very threshold, your forbearance. Of your candor and kindness I am sure, and therefore trust that you will look leniently on my failure to achieve the tact and skill so often exhibited by the distinguished gentlemen who have preceded me. I also know that you do not expect me to bring to the chair the world-wide renown of my immediate and, I might truly add, illustrious predecessor and friend, Dr. Mott.

